

MUSIC

Rachmaninoff

Carnegie Music Hall was completely filled last night by the enthusiastic audience gathered to hear Sergel Rachmaninoff, a superb pianist and artist, appearing in the Ellis series. There is no other pianist whose work is so utterly dazzling in effect. This is partly due to his extraordinary technical command, no doubt; partly to his virile rhythms, partly to his magnificent management of dynamics and tone-coloring. No matter how many times a phrase may recur, each time it comes with an intense individuality, showing the thought in a new and meaningful aspect. There seems to be no limit to the enchanting modulations of mood, and if he expresses himself with incisive and memorable firmness, his intellectual and poetical faculties, too, have tremendous scope.

Compositions suffer a sea-change, as he plays them, into something rich and often quite strange. The details are unconventional, sometimes startling, but they are always logically linked together, and in the end always convincing, even inevitable. He seems to assimilate the music so completely into his own imagination that it comes out necessarily colored by his dazzling, rather exotic personality. There can be no question of the sincerity of the interpretation, when the result is so satisfying, and the personality is so interesting, the musicianship so exquisite, that it is in his power to give delight even in music of inferior quality.

Last night's program was not calculated to exhibit his genius in its larger or deeper qualities, and it sometimes taxed the power of his vitalizing imagination rather heavily. It opened with three Ballades by Liszt and Grieg and Chopin. The Liszt is a very good example of that composer and has passages of considerable loveliness, but as a whole it is somewhat tenuous in thought. The one by Grieg is fresh, of a larger mould than one commonly finds in Grieg, but it suffers from the inconsecutiveness that frequently attends the variation form. The one by Chopin, in A flat, is a beautiful and effective work, unquestionably, but not among his greatest. Neither are the Nocturne and Waltz, both in D flat, among his higher flights. The triumphant Chopin was heard only in the Scherzo, Opus 39, which was the high-water mark of the evening's interest.

Mr. Rachmaninoff's own "Elegie" and "Polka on a theme by W. R." were salon pieces, one conventionally sentimental, the other conventionally bright. Some significance may be seen in the fact that the former is dedicated to Arensky; the initials allow one to believe that family affection caused him to use the trivial theme of the Polka. Dohnanyi's Etude was one of the most stunning exhibitions of fireworks I have heard. It was followed by the pianist's transcription of Kreisler's "Liebeslied," but Mr. Kreisler has himself arranged so many compositions of other men that he cannot complain of what Mr. Rachmaninoff has done to his. The Liszt "Tarantella," an ordinary show piece, closed the program, though the performance was not at all ordinary. It never was that; even the basest material was transmuted to gold by the performer's genius. But this does not prevent one from wishing that the program had been of higher and more sustained value.

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